

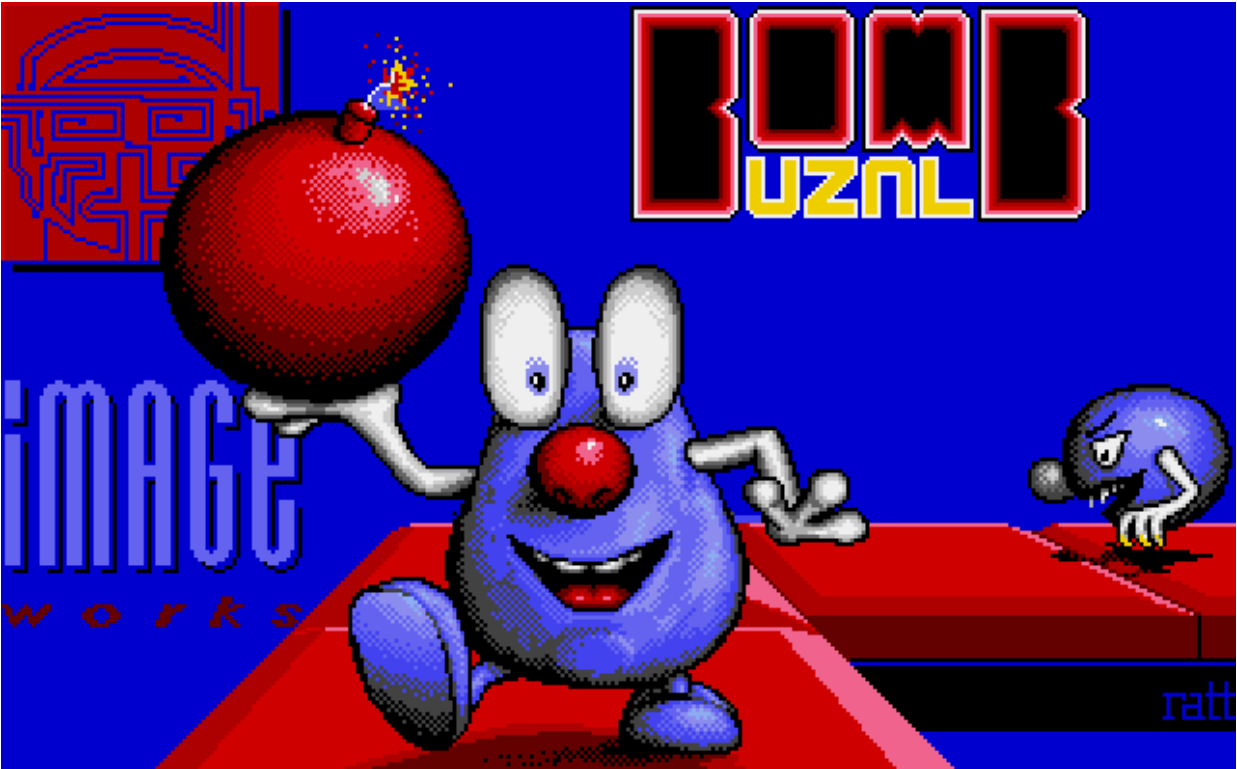
# **Kid Gloves killed the video game star?**

**written by dreamkatcha**

One of the regularly recurring debates emanating from Amiga magazine publication revolved around the humble coverdisk. What should be on it? PD software? Retail software demos? Complete retail games? And why stop at a single floppy? Why not have two or three? At one point, some magazines actually 'gave away' *four*, almost entirely obliterating the cover art, much to the chagrin of the beleaguered art editor.



All three categories of software were offered over the years, to varying degrees of appreciation dependant on the perceived impact upon the software industry. Nevertheless, it was unrestricted retail games that caused the most consternation amidst publishers and ELSPA, the authoritative body representing those with a stake in the game, so to speak.



It was party time for us readers, of course, since we were gifted hand-selected, hopefully respectable titles for the meagre sum of between £2.99 and £4.99, a fraction of the cost of even mainstream *budget* software.



Pros and cons were incessantly batted back and forth amongst the Amiga magazine letters pages, often without wholly understanding the issues invoked. Thus it was a major step forwards in terms of transparency to hear the official verdict as delivered by top ELSPA spokesman, Roger Bennett.



## **ELSPA Talks! Cover-mounted games - right or wrong?**

There's been a lot of talk lately - both in the industry and judging from your letters on the 'streets' - about complete games being given away on cover-mounted disks. The whole controversy blew up around the launch of Amiga Power and our early promise to give away a complete game with each issue, so it's a subject that's affected Amiga Power readers (and potential readers) more than anyone else. That being the case, we thought it a good idea to call up Roger Bennett, General Secretary of trade body ELSPA (the European Leisure Software Publishers Association), to explain the situation. Here we go.



(Brrring brrring). Hello. It's Amiga Power here. We'd like to ask you a few questions about cover-mounted disks and why the industry's so dead against magazines putting complete games on them.

Well, first off I've got to stress that ELSPA itself doesn't have any mandate allowing us to tell anybody what to do, we can merely act as a forum for discussion and give advice. What happened with the covermounted disk issue was that a number of software publishers saw that with Amiga Power offering complete 16-bit games you had the possibility of a magazine cover-mount war starting similar to that which has developed in the 8-bit market, and they saw the opportunity to put a halt to it before it got going. Our argument is that covermounts have killed the full price Spectrum software market, and it was for the good of us all to prevent that happening with the Amiga.



But couldn't you equally argue that cover-mounted games keep people interested in using their computers, buying magazines about them, reading about more games and makes them much more likely to go out and buy something they really want?

Well, that's certainly not the view of the majority of our members. The industry looks at games as having three 'windows of sales opportunity' as they say. First, there's selling the game at full price, somewhere around the £25 or £40 mark. Then there's the second window of opportunity where a product becomes available as part of a compilation, selling for a similar sort of price. Third comes the budget games release, when it's felt that a product has outlived its useful life on other formats and it then becomes reasonable to make it available for about a tenner. We don't want to damage our chances of selling games at any of these price points.

And what's wrong with cover-mounts being a fourth 'window of opportunity'?

The problem is that there would be pressure to covermount games that haven't yet been on compilation or budget release, thus denying software houses secondary ways of earning money from their products.



But it's still the software house's choice - surely nobody's forcing anyone to covermount a game they think they've got another use for?

The other problem is one of perception. What's the point of software publishers packaging games in nice boxes with good manuals and trying to make software something that's simply nice to own and worth £25 or whatever when magazines are giving away loose disks? Covermounts are undermining the perceived value of what a game is.



But no more so than compilations or budget releases, which are equally 'undermining' the concept of a game being worth £25. If Xenon 2 was worth £25 two years ago and it's only worth a tenner now surely it's logical that it'll be worth about, ooh, £2.95 a bit further on down the line and be ripe for covermounting? After all, you can buy stand-alone Amiga games for that sort of price now anyway.



But at least they come in nice packaging so their perceived value is higher. The software publisher isn't just selling a few disks and bits of paper, he's selling what you might call 'a dream' in a very real sense, and that dream is tarnished when a game is put on a magazine.

What, even when a magazine devotes two or three pages to really explaining a game they give away, thus doing a much better job of presenting it than most software

packaging? Imagine a situation where magazines put their disks in nice boxes, like the Spectrum mags do with their compilation cassettes. The 'dream' wouldn't be tarnished at all then.



ELSPA members are worried enough that a single standalone game is being sold with a magazine and thus eating dramatically into the time a purchaser would otherwise spend with bought software. If they saw double-disk issues or compilation disks becoming the norm it would be great news for the consumer, but it would really damage software sales and put some companies out of business. Cutting back on covermounted games will actually be good news for the games player in the long run, because only through software houses being able to continue making decent profits will there be the money about to invest in new games.

So there you have it. Whatever you think about the ELSPA arguments, Roger is undeniably right about one point - no magazine (Amiga Power included) can be forced to stop putting software on the covers, they can merely be persuaded to stop in the interests of the software industry. We've made the decision that, things being as they are, no more complete commercial games will appear on our coverdisks for the foreseeable future. Yes, (in the short term at least) that's bad news for you, but it's what makes sense at the moment. (Just don't expect this to be the last word you see written on the subject, that's all).

### **Amiga Power issue 4 (August 1991)**



This and other correspondence/editorial sparked much debate over subsequent months and years, though one pertinent catechism that piqued my curiosity was the

following snagged from the 'and another thing' column of issue 13's letters page...

"Michael Barker of Hull would like ELSPA to explain why, if full-game coverdisks affect sales, Kid Gloves appeared in a healthy chart position several months after being covermounted on AP2.

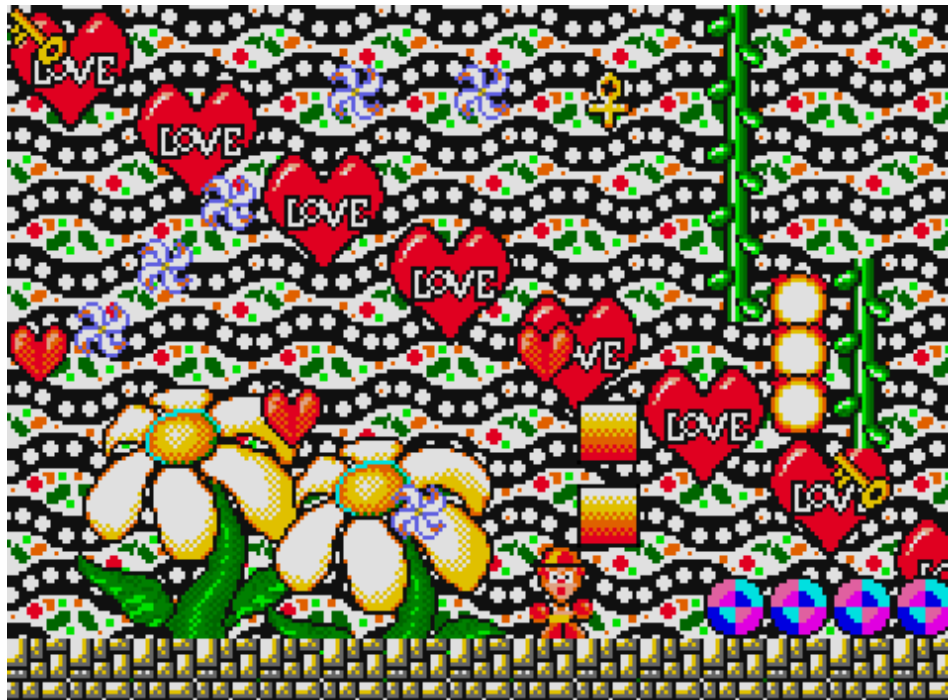
Good point, Michael..."

### **Amiga Power issue 13 (May 1992)**



He didn't dream this, and ELSPA's hypothesis was indeed cobblers. Having first been reviewed by Zero in April 1990, the full version of Kid Gloves appeared on Amiga Power's August 1991 coverdisk, accompanying issue 2. Millennium's enormously frustrating, yet strangely addictive platformer ensuingly re-entered the sales charts at no. 56 in November 1991 (GBH budget release, £7.99). Then dropped to no. 81 in December before fading back into obscurity.

I'm not sure I'd call either entry a healthy position, though it certainly seems to be a minor resurgence. One likely triggered by Amiga Power's promotional influence. Amiga Power didn't exist prior to May 1991 so no top 100 sales compilation is available for pre-coverdisk chart position comparison. While other magazines documented the same ground, I'm not aware of any that published so many entries at this point in time. Top 10 or 20 listings are available, none of which feature an entry for Kid Gloves, so clearly it wasn't massively popular upon first release. Kid Gloves - originally sold at the premium retail price of £24.99 - was quickly reduced to £16.99. By August 1990 it had already been relegated to budget status for both the Atari ST and Amiga release.



We interrupt this broadcast to bring you some fascinating biographical tidbits concerning the author, courtesy of The One magazine. In their May 1990 review (scoring Kid Gloves a respectable 77%), Gary Penn enlightened the readers with the following missive. Shame that he misnamed him, making

his witty headline redundant; Timothy's surname is actually Closs with a C. Oops.

## Glossing over facts

Kid Gloves is the 16-bit debut of 18-year old former Spectrum programmer Timothy Gloss. The name may not ring any bells, but chances are two of his games will... The budget beauties I, Ball and II, Ball II for Firebird are probably what he's best known for, but there were other attempts at commercial success beforehand, like Timothy's first-ever release: Bomber Bob for Bug Byte. This 'tribute' to Tecmo's Bombjack (which, for the record, was officially converted to 16-bit by Elite) surfaced five years ago, and was followed by a 400-room arcade adventure in the Starquake mould (16-bit originals courtesy of Mandarin) and entitled Tremor for US Gold. Before Timothy got bored with the 'Spectrum and moved to 16-bit he wrote a football game for Firebird called European Five-Aside.

Out of all his games, Kid Gloves is the one he's enjoyed programming most: "I like playable games that aren't too difficult to get into. I don't like inch-thick manuals." Timothy likes to play the same sort of games as he writes, although he *does* favour shoot 'em ups, mainly in the arcades though, with Salamander and R-Type numbering among his favourites. "I did write a 16-bit shoot 'em up, but it never got released. I just don't seem to be able to write them properly." Sadly, Mr Gloss' first 16-bit game could be his last... "I'm concentrating on my Maths degree, so won't have the time to program any more. Well, not unless money becomes a problem."



If it *did*, I'm sure Timothy welcomed the pay cheque from Amiga Power with open arms. Budget cheapo or not by this stage, Kid Gloves wasn't selling, so any royalties received would have been a bonus. For gamers, it would have made more sense to buy Amiga Power no. 4 as a back issue costing £3.50 including postage and packaging. That many people instead plumped for the boxed version, I suppose demonstrates that some of us just like to own nicely designed, shiny cardboard containers, even if they incur a £4.49 penalty. Natch, it takes all sorts.